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UNITED STATES
DEPARTMENT
OF AGRICULTURE

Radio Service

OFFICE OF
INFORMATION

HOMEMAKERS' CHAT

Wednesday, November 20, 1940.

(FOR BROADCAST USE ONLY)

Subject: "FUNCTIONAL COTTON HOUSE DRESSES." Information from the Bureau of Home Economics, U. S. Department of Agriculture.

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That word "functional" we hear so often these days can be applied to our house dresses, says Clarice L. Scott, clothing specialist of the Bureau of Home Economics in the U. S. Department of Agriculture. She says,

"Women's housework dresses of today should be 'functional', because they need to be suited to the kinds of activities homemakers have,- stooping, reaching, moving furniture about, washing dishes. Women want to be able to do all their jobs and still look attractively dressed when they answer the doorbell. They want to be comfortable, but not untidy. House dresses soon get soiled and need laundering. So practical homemakers like to have half a dozen or more inexpensive cotton outfits that can be easily washed and ironed.

"Modern homemakers are quite a contrast to the women of half a century ago who wore 'Mother Hubbards' in the mornings. Later on, women wore 'kimonos' or 'bungalow aprons' or some other kind of hybrid garments,- neither aprons nor dresses. Long-sleeved smocks and middy blouses had a vogue for a while. But most of these garments were loose and sloppy and easily soiled. They were slow to iron and expensive because they required so much material. They were worn with apologies.

"But you need make no apologies today if you choose simple, becoming, washable dresses designed expressly for housework. It's a good plan to select cottons that have an all-over pattern in clear, clean-looking colors. Patterned materials do not show soil as quickly as plain ones do. Then there's nothing to prevent you from putting on an apron when you have to work at the sink or about

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the stove. And for a few dirty jobs, like cleaning floors or washing windows, there's something to be said for shorts or slacks, or even playsuits in hot weather. The chief drawback about these sports types of clothes is that they are only becoming if your figure is good.

Miss Scott also says: "A one-piece dress is more to the taste of the mature housewife. It's easy to put on, and when well chosen, it stays trim and neat at the waist-line. There are many variations in the princess and shirt-waist styles of dresses, made in one piece. Cotton percale, broadcloth, or chambray, either printed or in plain colors, are good materials for shirt-waist dresses. Also madras, gingham, and seersucker are good choices. Any cotton fabrics with a close weave become soiled more slowly than loosely woven materials, and so do mercerized cottons and those with linen-like finishes. Printed materials look clean the longest.

"Ready-made washable housedresses cost relatively little, and you may not save much money by making your own. But if you have time for sewing, you will often get better material in a dress for the same cost by buying yard goods. And you can have just the colors and fit you like. If you take pains with the workmanship, the dress has a good chance of lasting well, and of being much easier and quicker to iron than the ready-mades.

"Better fit is one of the biggest differences between the housedresses of today and those of the kimono or bungalow apron periods," Miss Scott. thinks. She says, "Homemade dresses also afford an opportunity for better fit than ready-mades. We modern women want to look trim and be comfortable at the same time. We want dresses that stay in place no matter what kind of work we do.

"We have to use our arms freely in most of our housework, so we want roomy, comfortable armholes and necklines, short sleeves that don't bind, or none at all.

There are some new designs with wide armholes and sleeve-like effects that give greater freedom. For example, perhaps just a little extension piece over the shoulder, or a capelet." Miss Scott has a personal preference for a fairly short, six-gored skirt on a housedress. She also says:

"We can give play to our liking for bright, pretty colors in our housedresses. Whatever the color or fabric, be sure to ask whether the color is fast,-- fast to laundering and to light. And how much shrinkage, if any, you must expect. Many manufacturers give shrinkage information on the label of a garment or on the end of a bolt of goods.

"Consider whether you can get quickly into a dress made in the style you like. Are the closings easy to manage? Zippers and medium-sized flat buttons and buttonholes are good. So are the new metal snaps that are now sold with gadgets for installing them. These snaps can be had in metal or colored enamel tops. Plackets need strong neat finishes at the ends, whatever fastenings you use. The placket in a housedress gets lots of hard wear.

"Is the pocket located convenient to the hand? Yet where it won't catch on door knobs, pot handles, or other projections? You need a really useful pocket in a work dress, of a practical size and shape, and it should be well reinforced against tears.

"Will the trimming last as long as the dress? Is it fussy? Are the seams flat, so they will dry out quickly when ironed? And, finally, how long will it take you to iron the model that interests you? Puffed or gathered sleeves, for example, are tedious to iron, and so are shirrings and pleats, especially in skirts. Remember, if you are like most homemakers, you will have three or four housedresses in the wash each week. Keep them 'functional.'"

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